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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Forty-seventh session

REPORT OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (30-31 January 1997)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Ali M'chumo (United Republic of Tanzania).

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE SIXTH MEETING AND THE REPORT OF THE FIFTH MEETING

2. The Agenda (EC/47/SC/CRP.3/Rev.1) and the Draft Report of the 19 December 1996 Meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/47/SC/CRP.4) were both adopted without revision.

III. PROGRAMME AND FUNDING ISSUES

3. The Standing Committee had before it a document entitled, *Overall Programme and Funding Projections for 1996 and 1997* (EC/47/SC/CRP.5) and an amended draft decision.

4. The agenda item was introduced by the Director of the Division of Operational Support (DOS). In the review of 1996 programmes, it was pointed out that General Programmes remained at the approved level of $ 445.3 million and programme needs under Special Programmes were now projected at $ 887.3 million. The uses made of, and reimbursements to, the Emergency Fund and the Voluntary Repatriation Fund were also reviewed. Expenditures against the Programme Reserve were also considered. As regards 1997 programmes, the General Programmes target remained at $ 452.6 million, as approved by the Executive Committee at its forty-seventh session. Needs under Special Programmes were currently estimated at $ 737.8 million.

5. In his presentation, the Director focused on trends in relation to UNHCR's share of the United Nations Regular Budget and briefly outlined the

background to this issue. The Director also clarified the text of EC/47/SC/CRP.5, para. 16, noting that discussions between UNHCR and UNOG on a range of budgetary issues had been ongoing in the course of 1997.

6. The current funding situation was also reviewed by the Head of the Funding and Donor Relations Service. He indicated that donor response to UNHCR's needs in 1996 had been very positive with regard to General Programmes. The Standing Committee was reminded of the funding priority which the Office attached to General Programmes and the trend of increased contributions in recent years to these programmes was welcomed. Major Special Programmes in the former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes region (Central Africa) had suffered in 1996, however, because contributions to them had been slow in coming. Needs in 1997 were currently estimated at $ 1.2 million. It was indicated that the High Commissioner would visit, in the course of 1997, a number of potential donor countries in an effort to broaden UNHCR's donor base.

7. In the interventions in response to these presentations, delegations posed a number of questions regarding carry-over figures as well as current and previous years' budgets for the former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes region (Central Africa). It was also proposed that the repatriation programmes for the Horn of Africa be more clearly presented by indicating the country components separately. A number of delegations also expressed concern at reductions in the support from the Regular Budget for UNHCR and the growing tendency to fund posts and expenses normally covered by the Regular Budget though recourse to voluntary contributions. Some delegations underlined the broader significance of the Regular Budget contribution to UNHCR as being an expression of the universal support for the mandate of UNHCR by the international community. One delegation drew attention to the tight timetable, if the Executive Committee was going to meaningfully address the issue of UNHCR's share of the Regular Budget in the 1998-1999 biennium. Some delegations expressed reservations about the suggestion that UNHCR might try to negotiate a contribution from the Regular Budget in the form of a grant.

8. The Director of the Division of Administration (UNOG), in responding to issues relating to the Regular Budget, focused on recent overall reductions determined by the General Assembly for the Regular Budget and the logic of the UNOG proposal to move budgetary provisions related to UNHCR's general operating expenses from the UNOG chapter of the Regular Budget to the chapter dealing with UNHCR. With regard to the recently introduced charges to UNHCR for the use of conference rooms and office space at the Palais des Nations for all meetings (except the annual session of the Executive Committee plenary), he said that these would be reviewed by UNOG

9. In the light of the various interventions, the draft decision on programmes and funding projections was modified accordingly. The revised decision adopted by the Standing Committee is annexed.

IV. SITUATIONS REPORTS

10. The Standing Committee had two regional reviews to consider under this Agenda Item: the *Update on Regional Developments in Central Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East* (EC/47/SC/CRP.6), and an oral update on the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

A. CASWANAME regional developments

11. Before opening discussion on the first topic under this agenda item, the Chairman called on Mr. M. Djemali, Deputy Director for Central Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (CASWANAME) Operations, to give a brief introduction to the paper. In his introduction, Mr. Djemali referred to the CASWANAME region as being one of the most volatile regions of the world and a perennial source of population displacements, resulting in both refugees and internally displaced persons. He further informed the Standing Committee of the Office's activities in each of the sub-regions of CASWANAME.

12. Delegations, while generally commending UNHCR on the quality of the paper, offered comments and posed several questions regarding UNHCR's work in the region. The situation of women in Afghanistan, including female UNHCR staff working in the country, was the subject of concern from several delegations and delegations requested further information on UNHCR programmes for women in Afghanistan. Remaining on the topic of Afghanistan, delegations expressed the view that while repatriation remained the only viable solution to the Afghan refugee problem, deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan had resulted in a sharp decline in the number of Afghan refugees wishing to repatriate. Therefore, it was suggested, UNHCR needs to increase it's care and maintenance programmes for Afghan refugees in countries of asylum while at the same time continuing it's rehabilitation efforts inside the country in order to encourage refugees to repatriate. Another delegation requested further information on why Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran did not return through Turkmenistan, as arranged for by UNHCR and the Governments concerned. More details on UNHCR assistance in Afghanistan and recent repatriation movements to the country was requested by a delegation, which also asked whether or not UNHCR staff had free access to all areas of Afghanistan.

13. In commenting on other areas of the report, one delegation requested clarification concerning the statistics on Western Saharan refugees in Tindouf. He suggested that additional information on how these statistics were arrived at be provided either in the report of the High Commissioner to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) or, alternatively, that the letter sent to the delegation by UNHCR in response to questions it had previously raised be issued as a Standing Committee document. Mr. Djemali informed the delegation that the matter would be taken into consideration. Another delegation enquired about the reason for the increase in the care and maintenance budget for refugees from Mali and Niger. The same delegation, referring to the inspection mission outlined in paragraph 105 of the paper, noted this as an encouraging practice.

14. UNHCR's withdrawal from Atroush camp in northern Iraq met with differing response from delegations. One delegation commended UNHCR for the decision to withdraw from Atroush camp and to discontinue assistance at that location, while another delegation suggested that UNHCR review it's policy in relation to this population.

15. On the subject of the bi-communal programme in Cyprus, one delegation said that paragraph 95 of the paper was in error in stating that the nursery served both communities. UNHCR undertook to look into the matter and revert.

16. In commenting on the state of refugees from Western Sahara, one delegation stated that these refugees could not repatriate because of the situation in their places of origin. Further, it was expressed that many would certainly choose to repatriate should a peaceful solution to the problem be found.

17. With reference to the format of the paper, one delegation suggested that such reports should be standardized, clearly indicating voluntary repatriation activities, statistics and operations in the various countries. The same delegation also requested further information on the Ashgabat inter-agency meeting on Afghanistan.

18. Support for the CASWAME initiative for regional consultations was voiced by delegations, although several requested more information about the objectives of the process and asked how closely this initiative would mirror the CIS process. There was disagreement amongst delegations on participation in the meetings on this initiative, with some delegations stressing the need to limit participation to the countries in the region and other delegations requesting a more open process involving countries other than those in the region which are also affected by refugee problems. One delegation posed a number of questions seeking clarification on whether or not the Executive Committee would be asked to endorse the process, or if there had been any reaction and/or coordination with other international organizations. Further, this delegation asked to be informed on the possibility of linking these consultations with political processes currently taking place in the region.

B. Update on Great Lakes Region of Africa

19. The Assistant High Commissioner delivered an oral update on the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa, reviewing recent developments in Burundi, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire. In addition to his country-by-country assessment of the complex and volatile situation, he suggested lessons which could be drawn from recent experiences in the region.

20. In summarizing, he said that he was encouraged by the spirit in which the sub-regional and national agencies were cooperating on humanitarian coordination, noting the continued need for a regional coordination mechanism that was light and mobile.

21. The phasing down of UNHCR regional operations in Zaire and the United Republic of Tanzania, and consolidation under the Director and Special Envoy based in the region were cited as priorities.

22. Staff security was emphasized as an issue of major concern. The AHC said that all possible measures were being taken to extend maximum protection to UNHCR's international and national staff working in constantly changing security environments.

V. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LARGE REFUGEE POPULATIONS ON HOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

23. This agenda item and its related documentation (EC/47/SC/CRP.7) was introduced by the Director of DOS. Appreciation for the documentation was

expressed by a number of delegations, however, some delegations felt that the conference room paper was not sufficiently action oriented.

24. A number of delegations from asylum countries spoke of the significant contributions of their Governments over extended periods of time in hosting refugees, and the impact of such populations on the economic and social life of their countries. Particular tribute was paid to the burden shouldered by least developed countries in hosting refugee populations. Several delegations noted that the international community had fallen short of meeting its obligations to support host Governments in coping with large refugee influxes. It was pointed out that while large refugee inflows often caught the media eye and attracted massive financing in the short-term, it was also important that the long-term perspective of the impact on host countries and their societies be taken into account. This was particularly evident in the case of long-staying refugee populations. The scarcity of available funds for rehabilitation in comparison with those for emergencies was noted with concern by one delegation.

25. It was suggested that UNHCR should continue to play a catalytic role, engaging other United Nations agencies, particularly UNDP, WFP and UNICEF, in a policy and strategy dialogue on this issue. In addition, it was recommended that UNHCR should play a similar role in facilitating impact analysis and early rehabilitation measures. It was further stressed that development agencies should assume greater responsibility in addressing the impact of refugees on the host countries at the earliest possible stage of the emergency.

26. A number of delegations asked for a more active role by UNHCR in the mobilization of resources, stressing that attention should be given not only to donor countries, but also to the World Bank and other financial institutions. The duration of stay of refugee populations in a country should be taken into account when formulating strategies to address their impact. One delegation stated that a way to begin addressing this problem might be through the better use of existing developmental resources.

27. Several delegations suggested that the issue of the social and economic impact of large refugee populations on host developing countries be kept under review. In order to have a clearer view of the situation of host countries, one delegation requested that future reports on this issue contain a list of asylum countries indicating the number of refugees they were hosting and the duration of the refugees stay.

28. Several delegations, while noting the serious impact that large refugee populations have on host countries and the need for the international community to show solidarity with such countries, pointed out that Governments do have specific obligations under international refugee law and that the discharge of these obligations should not be made conditional on other factors.

29. In commenting on the interventions, the Director of DOS noted that the lack of operational measures in the CRP reflected the complexities of the problems created by large refugee influxes and the difficulties of actually developing strategies that would work quickly. The impact of such refugee influxes had to be met largely by developmental, not emergency assistance; the problem was that developmental aid cycles did not readily lend themselves to timely remedial action. The Director stated that the issue of addressing

the impact of refugee influxes was a very real one and was being pursued by UNHCR with other relevant international agencies in the appropriate fora.

30. A number of amendments to the draft decision were proposed. It was agreed that further consultations would be undertaken with concerned delegations to agree on a text reflecting the various concerns. The revised text would be submitted to the April meeting for adoption.

VI. ENVIRONMENT

31. The conference room paper on *Refugees and the Environment* (EC/47/SC/CRP.8) was introduced by the Director of DOS. He drew attention to *UNHCR's Environmental Guidelines* published in 1996, as well as commenting on a range of activities which had been developed to implement the Guidelines. A presentation was also made which highlighted the use UNHCR made of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and satellite imagery for environmental planning in its operations.

32. In their interventions, delegations expressed broad support for UNHCR's environmental policy and activities. However, a number of observations were made and questions asked. These were responded to by the Senior Coordinator on Environmental Affairs and the Director of DOS.
In regard to UNHCR's mandate and its environmental activities, one delegation felt that the reference to leading roles in Annex 2 para. (b) of the conference room paper could be misleading; UNHCR undertook to clarify and revise the relevant document. The need for UNHCR to promote coordination with other agencies was also raised. UNHCR stated that considerable efforts had been devoted to strengthening such coordination. Examples cited included the International Symposium on Environment and Mass Migration which had been convened by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Refugee Policy Group (RPG) in April 1996, as well as the recently initiated lessons learnt projects undertaken in conjunction with other agencies. The importance of ensuring that the Guidelines were reflected in programming as a whole was also stressed by delegations. The subject of green procurement was also raised. UNHCR noted that a draft report on how to implement "greener" procurement policies would soon be finalized; this would take into account the current practices of other organizations. More specific points raised by delegations included questions relating to the transfer of technology and local capacity building; cost benefit analysis of high tech tools; and the status of an agreement between the United States Government's GLOBE Programme and UNHCR.

VII. FOLLOW-UP TO ECOSOC RESOLUTION 1995/56

33. The Standing Committee had before it a report submitted by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) entitled *Progress on the Follow-Up to ECOSOC Resolution 1995/56* (EC/47/SC/CRP.9).

34. In opening the discussion on this agenda item, the Chairman recalled the Standing Committee's 1996 thematic discussions on ECOSOC resolution 1995/56, which culminated in the adoption of a detailed conclusion by the forty-seventh session of the Executive Committee. The Chairman reminded the meeting that the conclusion of the Executive Committee called for UNHCR, in coordination with DHA, to report to the January 1997 Standing Committee on progress made in interagency consultations on the formulation of a

comprehensive set of proposals, recommendations and options for submission to the 1997 substantive session of ECOSOC.

35. The Chairman invited the Secretary to read a statement on behalf of the Assistant High Commissioner (AHC) introducing this agenda item. The AHC highlighted certain aspects of the DHA report most relevant to UNHCR. In respect of coordination arrangements, he recalled that his recent experience in the Great Lakes region of Africa exemplified the need for a unified, coordinated and flexible response from the United Nations system. To ensure responsiveness and flexibility, he said, the system requires a range of coordination mechanisms to select from depending on the dictates of specific complex emergencies. Mechanisms adopted need, moreover, to be regularly reviewed and adapted as circumstances change. The AHC also emphasized the principle that emergency assistance must be intimately linked to recovery assistance, if long term solutions to refugee emergencies are to be found. An important challenge was how to operationalize such principles

36. The Chairman then called upon Mr. Philippe Boullé, Acting Director of the Geneva Office of DHA, to introduce the conference room paper and to provide an update on other important developments in relation to the ECOSOC resolution. Mr. Boullé updated the Committee on the status of the five Sub-Working Groups created as a result of resolution 1995/56 to examine the issues of evaluation and accountability; internally displaced persons; local capacity/relief and development; staff development; and resource mobilization. He also informed the meeting of the progress of interagency discussions on strategic and operational coordination and gave a brief description of the proposed Humanitarian Coordinator's role. Mr. Boullé then turned to the issue of consultations with member States on this resolution. He informed the Committee that consultations with Governments would take place once the internal process had finished, which he hoped would be by mid-February 1997. Finally, in returning to the work of the Sub-Working Groups, Mr. Boullé reported that a certain "synergy" had developed between members as a result of the consultation process, which had provided a positive climate of collaboration.

37. Delegations, while expressing overall support for this process, raised several questions on a number of issues, some of which were still being examined by the Sub-Working Groups. Delegations stressed that the efficacy of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as a coordinating body was vital. Some stressed the need to improve the IASC's working methods. One delegation commented that the process in general should be as transparent and clear as possible, and should include government participation. Other issues raised by delegations included the need for further improvements to consolidated appeals; monitoring and evaluation; the role of Humanitarian Coordinator in relation to that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General; and response to IDP needs. One delegation asked to know UNHCR's opinion on how the safety and security of aid workers could be better ensured. UNHCR was also asked to give its view on whether a lead agency was able to play the impartial role required of a coordinator. Further, UNHCR was requested to comment on it's opinion of progress in this process of consultations, especially in light of the role it has played in Great Lakes region of Africa. A number of delegations urged agencies to be bold and creative in their recommendations for implementation of the resolution.

38. In response to these queries Mr. Boullé again pointed out the necessity in maintaining a process that was flexible and allowed for improvisation, when necessary, a point echoed by the IASC Coordinator in his comments.

39. In response to questions posed to UNHCR, the Secretary underlined UNHCR's active participation in and strong support of the consultation process and the need for improved humanitarian coordination. Overall, he felt that it had been a fruitful process, allowing an unprecedented exchange of views. He cautioned, however, that the most difficult part of the process is yet to come.

40. On the question of the lead agency responsible for both strategic and operational coordination, the Secretary reiterated UNHCR's strong view that this should be among the coordination models available for responding to emergencies. It had the advantage of simplicity, of ensuring a strong operational focus and of avoiding multiple layers of coordination. UNHCR did not, however, believe that it would be appropriate to all situations. To guarantee the impartiality of a lead agency, that agency should be accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and IASC for the performance of its coordination functions. In a final comment, the Secretary stated that, in general, UNHCR has found value in the coordination efforts in the Great Lakes region of Africa, but believed that there was a need to maintain flexibility in the coordination arrangements applied to different kinds of situations.

VIII. AGENDA ITEMS 7 AND 8

41. Given that the time allotted for the meeting was coming to an end, the Secretary suggested that the remaining two agenda items might be forwarded for consideration at the April meeting of the Standing Committee. This seemed appropriate since the related documentation had been prepared as interim information papers; where appropriate, updates would be provided at the April meeting. After the meeting, the statement which had been prepared by the Deputy High Commissioner to introduce the *Update on Project Delphi* (EC/47/SC/CRP.13) was forwarded to Executive Committee Missions by the Secretariat.

IX. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

42. The Secretary reminded delegations of the first round of Informal Consultations on non-governmental organization observer participation in the work of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme and its Standing Committee, scheduled to immediately follow the meeting of the Standing Committee.

43. There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting.

DECISION ADOPTED BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE

DECISION ON PROGRAMME AND FUNDING PROJECTIONS

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the decision of the forty-seventh session of the Executive Committee on programme, administrative and financial matters,

(a) Notes that the overall needs for 1997, based on currently known or anticipated requirements, now amount to $1,215.9 million, of which projected needs for General Programmes remain at $ 452.6 million, as approved by the Executive Committee at its forty-seventh session, and those for Special Programmes are $ 737.8 million, while the remaining $ 25.5 million pertain to the United Nations Regular Budget;

(b) Expresses satisfaction with the positive trend in the level of contributions to General Programmes and, in view of the importance of the full funding of these programmes, urges the Office to sustain its efforts to ensure an improved, stable and balanced funding base for them;

(c) Notes the trends in relation to UNHCR's share of the United Nations Regular Budget as a result of further savings required in that budget over the next biennium and, bearing in mind the importance of the work of the Office, requests the High Commissioner to explore with the Secretary-General options for the level and form of the contribution from the Regular Budget.